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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000238

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STATE FOR AF/W DHEFLIN, ASILSKI
DOE FOR CGAY

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AF DAS MOSS'S MEETING WITH HOUSE SPEAKER
BANKOLE

REF: ABUJA 176

Classified By: Ambassador Robin R. Sanders for Reasons 1.4 (b & d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: AF DAS Todd Moss and the Ambassador met with Speaker of the House of Representatives Dimeji Bankole January 23. Bankole solicited USG assistance for building up the National Assembly (NASS) as a bona fide separate branch of government. Bankole said the GON is committed to the Gulf of Guinea Energy Security Strategy (GGESSION), but lacks the capacity to resolve the worsening security situation in the Niger Delta. He appeared eager and requested the USG to articulate a strategy, which he said the GON would be prepared to execute. Bankole also expressed support for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), and a Bilateral Investment Treaty. He also wants to explore ways to encourage more robust direct U.S. investment in the non-petroleum sector in Nigeria. The Speaker asserted the need for experts from the U.S. to be brought to Nigeria to train legislators on "how to be legislators" over the course of a 3-month boot camp-like training program, which he believes the GON will fund. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On January 23, visiting AF DAS Todd Moss, accompanied by the Ambassador, EconCouns, and PolOff (note taker), met with House Speaker Dimeji Bankole. DAS Moss praised President Yar'Adua's December visit to the White House, and pledged increased USG cooperation with the GON. The DAS queried Bankole about the investment climate in Nigeria, noting a Bilateral Investment Treaty would help to mitigate perceptions of risk and national treatment. On the issue of the Niger Delta, DAS Moss said the USG was prepared to work with the Nigerian military to offer surveillance training to enable the GON to tackle militancy in the Delta. The DAS remarked any solution to the Delta conflict cannot be purely military, as a political dialogue would help ensure all sides are given a proper forum for dissent. Also, DAS Moss asked Bankole about Nigerian peacekeeping efforts in Africa.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

¶3. (C) Bankole said the delay in the passage of the House budget is due to differing figures received from the Central Bank of Nigeria and the Ministry of Finance. As well, Bankole said the appropriations committee's recent investigations into rollover amounts from previous years have

led to the recovery of over USD 2.5 billion of unspent funds from different GON ministries. Bankole requested technical assistance for the appropriations and finance committees to build competence in monitoring disbursements and other financial activities. Bankole also expressed support for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in order to "hold people accountable." Bankole announced efforts to develop a project to combat poverty and unemployment by dividing debt relief proceeds among Nigeria's 36 states, and informed the House is devising its own 2020 development strategy (mirroring President Yar'Adua's 2020 plan). Moreover, Bankole believes the GON has improved its bona fides in the arena of fiscal responsibility and anti-corruption reforms to merit greater investment from the U.S., and expressed interest in a Bilateral Investment Treaty and ways to encourage direct U.S. investment in the non-petroleum sector in Nigeria.

NIGER DELTA

¶4. (C) With respect to the Gulf of Guinea Energy Security Strategy (GGESS), Bankole said the GON is committed, but lacks the capacity to resolve the worsening security situation in the Niger Delta. He appeared eager and solicited the USG for a "game plan," which he said the GON would be prepared to execute. The Speaker said the Nigerian military "can be properly engaged" to deal with the Delta but requires greater technical support to do so effectively. Since many people are "making money out of the Delta," Bankole remarked, many legislators and other Nigerians are hesitant to aggressively address the issue. Bankole also noted the House is developing its own legislation to address the matter, but has been reproached primarily by NASS members

ABUJA 00000238 002 OF 002

from the Delta region. Bankole stressed the need for the USG to "sign on for the long haul" since Bankole believes the GON will encounter a "lot of heat" with any approach into the Delta.

PEACEKEEPING

¶5. (C) Concerning Nigerian peacekeeping sacrifices in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Bankole said the GON and the Nigerian people are proud to conduct military interventions in neighboring states, and to be regarded as a "big brother" on the continent.

BOOT CAMP FOR LEGISLATORS

¶6. (C) Bankole assessed the Nigerian legislature remains in its incipient stages, having been ignored by previous administrations. While acknowledging the NASS had received assistance from the U.S., U.K., and other European governments during former president Obasanjo's tenure, Bankole admitted Obasanjo "may not" have done enough to develop the legislature. He appeared hopeful, however, that President Yar'Adua's commitment to rule of law and transparency would help the NASS act as an effective check on executive powers.

¶7. (C) Bankole asserted the need for a rigorous technical assistance program, in which experts from the U.S. would be brought to Nigeria to train legislators on "how to be legislators." He envisions a 3-month boot camp-like training program, which he believes the GON will fund, particularly, according to Bankole, given President Yar'Adua's support for the House's reform efforts. The Speaker also solicited more robust development assistance from American non-governmental organizations and USAID.

¶8. (U) NOTE: The Ambassador met previously with Bankole January 19 to discuss ways in which the USG can further support capacity building and transparency in the NASS. Bankole plans to visit Washington February 18-22 to meet with executive branch officials, NGO's, and representatives of the

American business community, and will seek meetings with legislative branch officials, including Speaker Pelosi, at a later date, possibly in late March (See Ref A). END NOTE.

¶9. (U) This cable has been cleared by DAS Moss.
SANDERS